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**BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness and Response**

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Good Morning Chairman Cuellar, Ranking Member Rogers and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. My name is Suzy DeFrancis, and I am the Chief Public Affairs Officer of the American Red Cross. Today's hearing entitled, "State of Citizen and Community Preparedness" is a very important issue for the Red Cross and the Nation. We commend the Subcommittee on Emergency, Communications, Preparedness and Response for drawing the public's attention to it at this hearing.

The timing of your hearing could not be more relevant. In addition to the fact that September is National Preparedness Month, we have unfortunately been reminded in the last two weeks of why preparedness matters. We have seen the arrest in the U.S. of a suspect in what is being called the most serious terrorist plot since 9-11. We have seen deadly flooding in Georgia and other Southeastern states, and earthquakes and tsunamis in the Pacific. We have seen school districts closed, one in Huntsville, Texas, athletic events cancelled, and sadly more deaths from the H1N1 virus.

With these incidents as a backdrop, we are reminded that the threat of disasters and other emergencies is very real today and requires us all to remain diligent in our efforts to be prepared and to get our families, neighbors, communities and country prepared.

Value of Preparedness

At the American Red Cross, our mission is to help people prevent, prepare for, and respond to disasters and other emergencies. We have been doing this work for more than a century. As you know, we are chartered by the Congress to perform our mission, and

we have specific responsibilities under ESF 6 of the National Response Framework. We shelter, feed, and counsel victims of disasters at home and abroad; collect and distribute nearly half of the nation's blood supply; teach preparedness and lifesaving skills; and we support military members and families through emergency communications. So whether it is a hurricane or heart attack, a call for blood or a call for help, the Red Cross is there around the corner, around the Nation, and around the world.

Each year, the American Red Cross responds to more than 70,000 disasters in communities nationwide from a single family house or apartment fire, to a large scale disaster like a hurricane. But whether it is a small or large-scale disaster, every disaster is an intensely personal tragedy for the people involved. That's why we want everyone to make a personal commitment to preparedness.

Being prepared can help you protect your family and loved ones in a disaster. It can help you respond effectively until help arrives. It can save lives. It can also save livelihoods by helping individuals and businesses get back on their feet faster. At the American Red Cross, we do important work in providing relief *after* a disaster strikes. But nothing is as important as what we do *before* disaster strikes. The old saying is right: An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

The investments we make in preparedness today have the potential to save countless lives and resources in the future. A study done in 2005 by the Multi-hazard Mitigation Council found: "On average, every dollar spent by FEMA on hazard mitigation (actions to reduce disaster losses) provides the nation with about \$4 in future benefits." So if \$1 spent on prevention can save \$4 in response, that is a significant return on investment and one our Nation should not fail to make.

Moreover, research also shows that those with the least suffer the most when disaster strikes. Most people who come to Red Cross shelters are people who have no where else to go and no money to pay for a motel room or other shelter. So we have an obligation as a society to make sure that we are promoting preparedness not just to those who can afford it, but to those at risk populations – the elderly, disabled, and poor – who are most vulnerable.

Polling on Preparedness

Even though 89 percent of the public believe it is important to be prepared – far fewer are actually taking the steps necessary to prepare, according to a Red Cross survey conducted in late July and early August. In many cases, they don't know what to do or they think it takes too much time.

That's why the Red Cross has worked with our federal partners at FEMA and DHS to send one consistent message about the 3 simple steps you can take to keep your loved ones safer: Get a Kit, Make a Plan, and Be Informed.

Our recent survey showed 80 percent of Americans had taken at least one key preparedness step, for example:

- 47% have assembled an emergency kit
- 45% have chosen an out of town contact
- 24% have practiced their emergency plan

But only 12 percent of Americans are reasonably prepared for a disaster, as recommended by the Red Cross.

So clearly the level of public preparedness remains very low, and we are not satisfied with the progress that has been made to date. We need to continue to find new and better strategies to reach the public with this message. We also need to have some fun. We launched a “Do More than Cross Your Fingers” campaign this year to promote preparedness with Jamie Lee Curtis as our celebrity spokesperson. She sent out an email about how she includes chocolate and dental floss in her preparedness kit – and it was one of the most-opened emails we have sent out.

One perception we need to change is that people think preparedness only applies to large scale disasters and they don’t think those will happen to them, or if they do, they think government will bail them out. But the fact is that disruptive emergencies strike far more often than people realize.

For example, our Red Cross survey showed that more than 50 percent of Americans have experienced at least one of the following emergencies:

- Losing Utilities for at least three days
- Evacuating their home
- Providing first aid to others.

These are the “everyday emergencies” that everyone should prepare for.

We also know that people prepare to the degree they think a threat is imminent. That’s why we are seeing a relatively high degree of preparedness about the HINI flu.

A recent poll conducted by the American Red Cross on H1N1 flu found an overwhelming majority of the public were taking steps against the virus:

- 78% are taking or planning to take extra measures to cover their coughs and sneezes with a tissue
- 76% are taking or planning to take extra measures to wash their hands more carefully.

The media took notice of the fact that women are more likely to take protective actions, with 84 percent making an extra effort to cover coughs and sneezes (versus 71 percent for

men) and 81 percent washing their hands more carefully and more often (compared to 71 percent for men).

The survey also found that 62 percent of those surveyed plan on being vaccinated against the new flu virus and nearly half of those survey (46 percent) plan on assembling a two-week supply of food, water and medicine in the event they or someone in their family becomes sick and needs to stay home for extended periods of time.

Red Cross Activities to Promote Preparedness

At the Red Cross, we are continually working on new and better ways to promote preparedness.

Each day, an estimated 50,000 people receive Red Cross training classes and preparedness education presentations. Our web site is full of links to preparedness information, and people can take many of these courses online. Numerous preparedness materials are also available in multiple languages aimed at different segments of the population.

For example, we have found that school children are very good at getting their parents to prepare, and we reach more than one million school children every year with our Masters of Disaster curriculum. We also have a Mother's Guide to Preparedness. You might be interested to know that according to some research, the most trusted and effective messengers on preparedness – even among adults – are their mothers.

The bulk of Red Cross programs and services are delivered through a vibrant network of 700 chapters located across the country. Chapters are able to tailor national programs to meet the diverse needs of their specific communities. They partner in their communities with local businesses, schools, emergency management, public health departments and Citizen Corps Councils.

I would like to highlight how local Red Cross chapters, many in your districts, are working with partners in their communities to become better prepared.

- The city of Laredo Texas is a hub of preparedness. The National Red Cross uses Laredo to pre-position support for hurricane evacuation and response, and the Laredo Red Cross branch and San Antonio Chapter work with the city to support the Hurricane Hub Shelters as part of the State Evacuation Plan.
- In Alabama, the Red Cross has worked with the Governor's Office of Faith-based initiatives to use community colleges as shelters when evacuation of the Gulf Coast is mandated, and we trained staff at the colleges in shelter operations. Masters of Disaster CDs, purchased with a grant from ALFA Insurance Co., have been distributed to every elementary school in a seven-county area over a five-year period.
- In Mississippi, we have more than 1,600 disaster-trained volunteers prepared to respond. Red Cross chapters across the state held shelter-management training

sessions this year with the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) and have also worked with NAACP and HOPE Worldwide to train more volunteers. As a result, while there is still room for growth, diversity across the Mississippi volunteer base is rising. In addition, the Red Cross prepares by pre-positioning supplies in Mississippi, including 11 preloaded kitchen support trailers, a 30,000 square foot headquarters/warehouse, and a fixed site Disaster Response Communications Network to enable connectivity between the National Red Cross Disaster Operations Center and local service delivery sites.

- In Louisiana, every one of the 4,000 families who worked with Red Cross caseworkers to plan their recovery from Katrina also developed a family evacuation and preparedness plan. Our “pillowcase project”, which started in New Orleans, gives children pillowcases with evacuation checklists that they can fill with everything from stuffed animals to a favorite book. Hundreds of kids in grades K-8 already have them and more will get the pillowcases and training this year. We know these projects have been a success because when Hurricane Gustav headed up the same area hit by Katrina, kids showed up in shelters with pillowcases and more people reported knowing where they needed to go and how to get there – that’s progress!

In addition to these ongoing preparedness efforts, I would like to focus today on two new initiatives: a program we just launched called Ready Rating, and our efforts to prepare the public for the H1N1 virus.

Partnering with Businesses: Ready Rating Program

One of the key recommendations from the 9/11 Commission was a call for improved private sector preparedness for a disaster, with creation of standards that would enable companies to voluntarily improve their readiness.

Studies have shown that one of every four small businesses that are forced to close because of a disaster never re-opens. But while 94 percent of small business owners told the Red Cross in a survey they worry about the potential for a disaster to disrupt their operations, many businesses do not know exactly what they should do, or worry they cannot afford the time or resources to take the actions necessary.

That’s why the American Red Cross has developed a first-of-its-kind program, called Ready Rating, which costs nothing but enables companies, schools and organizations to self-assess their readiness for emergencies or disasters of all kinds and take steps to become better prepared. It makes preparedness simple and doable.

The Red Cross Ready Rating program offers free memberships to businesses and schools, which can use an online checklist that measures their current preparedness efforts. Ready Rating members score themselves annually with the checklist, and they maintain their membership by developing and implementing an emergency response plan, giving preparedness information to employees and students and improving their overall score each year.

From a company's perspective, being prepared for emergencies is good business. Being prepared will enhance productivity by reducing the amount of time that employees are unable to work and will enable companies to minimize losses. And there's no question that better preparedness by schools and businesses helps the entire community respond and recover.

Ready Rating first began as a project of the American Red Cross of Greater St. Louis, where it now has nearly 150 members, including major businesses, schools and organizations of all sizes. Anheuser-Busch is the founding sponsor and first member of the Ready Rating program in St. Louis, and is supporting the expansion of the program to 16 more cities.

The Red Cross is rolling out Ready Rating this month in New Orleans, Washington, D.C., New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Dallas, Raleigh, N.C., and Chicago, with eight additional cities to be added early next year. We'd like to commend and thank Congressman Cao for signing on as a charter member of the Ready Rating program, helping to underscore the importance of preparedness in Southeast Louisiana.

Meetings about this new readiness program are also being held with groups such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Business Roundtable and the National Federation of Independent Businesses.

Al Martinez-Fonts, a Fellow at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the former Assistant Secretary for the Private Sector Office of DHS has praised the program saying: "Businesses have been looking for a program that gives them an easy, achievable path to preparedness, and Ready Rating gives companies of all sizes the roadmap to readiness."

As mentioned earlier, this is also a program that schools have embraced, and the Department of Education has commended the Red Cross for launching it and recognizes the important benefits it provides to schools.

Preparing for H1N1

Today the American Red Cross' current focus is preparedness for the H1N1 virus. As you know, this is a potentially serious health issue for families, schools and businesses across the country and the world and serves as a reminder of the importance of preparedness and contingency planning. The federal government estimates that as many as 40 percent of the country's population could become ill with the flu this fall and winter.

The American Red Cross plays an important role in educating the public on H1N1 preparedness.

We have developed an extensive section on our web site with fact sheets, widgets, videos and games for children that urge the public to follow basic public health steps to help

prevent the spread of the flu such as frequent hand washing, covering your mouth or nose when you cough or sneeze either with a tissue or with your elbow; minimizing contact with people who are sick as much as possible; and getting a flu shot for both seasonal flu and H1N1. We also have information on how to care for a loved one at home.

We have developed and distributed countless number of tear sheets that can be posted on bulletin boards in schools or offices. Our Philadelphia chapter distributed over 285,000 handouts at 570 Wawa stores.

We are using the social media space to post videos and messages about H1N1 on U-tube, Facebook and Twitter. Our Red Cross clubs are conducting outreach at schools and colleges.

And we are holding public meetings with other community partners to educate people about the virus and how they can stay healthy. Red Cross chapters stand ready in local communities to provide appropriate support and meet community needs.

In addition to educating the public, during a flu outbreak the Red Cross remains committed to its core services of maintaining a safe blood supply and providing disaster relief to those in need. The Red Cross has developed pandemic flu plans for sheltering operations, enabling us to continue to provide vital shelter to people in need while also safeguarding the health of shelter residents and workers.

Creating a Culture of Preparedness

The goal is to build a “culture of preparedness” throughout our Nation that helps families communities become safer and more prepared when disasters strike. No single organization, whether it is the government or the American Red Cross, can do this alone, but working together as a Nation, we can.

Department of Homeland Security

We are grateful for the close working relationship the Red Cross has developed with DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano and FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate. Our President and CEO Gail McGovern has been side-by-side Secretary Napolitano at a number of public events promoting preparedness, and we have worked with Administrator Fugate many times before when he was Director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management. .

As recently as this week, the Secretary came to the American Red Cross to deliver a major speech on Readiness and Resilience. The Secretary shared her belief that preparedness is a shared responsibility and summoned all of us to a grassroots effort to better prepare our communities for any kind of emergency. The American Red Cross appreciates her leadership on this issue and heartily backs her call to action. We would also note that not only does Secretary Napolitano preach preparedness, she practices it.

Just last month she invited the Red Cross to train her and her entire senior staff in CPR/AED.

United States Congress

We are also grateful for the United States Congress, which through the bipartisan leadership of this subcommittee and the full committee has also enhanced this culture of preparedness. Again, we want to thank you for holding this important hearing and would like to commend you, Mr. Cuellar, for introducing H.R. 5890 in the 110th Congress. This bipartisan bill, “the Citizen and Community Preparedness Act of 2008,” would establish a community preparedness division within the Department of Homeland Security as well as create a Citizen Corps Program, in which the Secretary of Homeland Security would convene a meeting to bring key government officials and stakeholders together to coordinate efforts around preparedness, planning, mitigation, response and recovery for acts of terrorism and natural disasters. The American Red Cross supported this measure last Congress and, should the bill be reintroduced in the 111th Congress, we look forward to working with Representative Cuellar and Rogers and all the Members of this Subcommittee to pass this important bill.

Partners in Preparedness

As we have learned in recent years, there can be disasters of such magnitude that American Red Cross systems may not be adequate to meet the needs. Therefore, additional community partners must be developed to help with those challenges.

At the Red Cross, we work with many non profit partners who have expertise in disaster response, such as the Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, LDS Church, and the Southern Baptist Convention. But we are also reaching out to other organizations who have not been traditionally involved in disasters. We work with them to develop and train volunteers, identify and staff shelters, and expand our ability to collect blood, especially in diverse communities.

Current examples of these key relationships include:

- A partnership with West Angeles Church of God in Christ, Los Angeles, California (more than 25,000 members)
- A partnership with First African Methodist Church, Los Angeles, California (more than 19,000 members)
- A partnership with Calvary Chapel Church, Chino, California (more than 10,000 members)
- A developing partnership with the Houston, Texas faith community spearheaded by Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee (12 key faith leaders from various denominations)

By reaching out to new groups, we can multiply the number of people who are prepared and will encourage others to be prepared. This is how we build the type of grassroots movement Secretary Napolitano envisions.

Conclusion

Chairman Cuellar, Ranking Member Rogers and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for allowing the American Red Cross to share with you our vision and showcase some of our outreach efforts as we continue to work toward fostering a culture of preparedness in our Nation. We look forward to the opportunity of further partnering with the United States Congress, other branches of government, the faith based community and other civic groups, non-profits and for-profits in carrying out this life saving preparedness message.